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NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 9, 2004

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Idaho's First 2004 Human Cases of West Nile Virus Infection Reported, Along with a Infected Bird from Ada County

West Nile virus has been discovered in two Idaho residents from Elmore and Gooding counties, while a crow in Ada County also has tested positive for the virus. These are the first people in Idaho to be reported with the virus in 2004, and the first evidence of West Nile virus in Ada County, Idaho's most populous county.

The two men, both in their 50s, suffered symptoms that included severe muscle aches, joint pain, sweating and fatigue. Neither man required hospitalization. Both men reportedly received multiple mosquito bites prior to their illness. The crow was collected Tuesday, with positive test results for West Nile virus received today.

"These cases show us how important it is for everyone in Idaho to protect themselves from mosquito bites that spread West Nile virus," says Dr. Christine Hahn, Idaho State Epidemiologist. "In recent weeks, West Nile virus has shown up in birds and other animals in a broad area of Idaho. Based on the experience of other states, we anticipated the spread of the virus to people, which is why we have been advising people to 'Fight the Bite' of mosquitoes."

West Nile virus has been discovered recently in animals in Canyon, Elmore, Gem, Gooding and Twin Falls counties. Several horses and an alpaca died or were euthanized due to severe illness from West Nile infection.

People and animals are infected by West Nile virus through the bite of an infected mosquito. People cannot contract the virus from casual contact with an infected animal or person. The virus is spread by migrating infected birds, which are bitten by mosquitoes. The infected mosquitoes can then pass the virus on to people and other animals.

Dr. Hahn says that approximately 80 percent of people infected with West Nile virus do not feel sick. Others may experience a mild, flu-like illness. Common symptoms of infection include headaches, body aches and a mild fever. Occasionally the virus can lead to serious illness requiring hospitalization, especially in people over the age of 50.

People can take the following precautions to protect themselves from mosquito bites:

- Insect-proof your home by repairing or replacing screens;
- Reduce standing water on your property that provides mosquito breeding habitat, such as bird baths and decorative ponds;
- Cover up exposed skin when outdoors;
- Apply insect repellent containing DEET to exposed skin and clothing. Follow instructions on the product label, especially for children;
- Avoid mosquitoes when they are most active at dawn and dusk;
- Report dead birds to your local District Health Department or Fish and Game office.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 1,200 people have tested positive for West Nile virus in the United States in 2004, resulting in 30 human deaths. Arizona and California account for over half of the West Nile human infections reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention this year.

West Nile infection is extremely virulent with horses and certain species of birds, including crows, magpies, ravens, jays and raptors. There is not a vaccine available for people and most animals, but there is a vaccine approved for horses. Approximately one-third of unvaccinated horses that are infected with West Nile virus die, so horse owners are strongly encouraged to contact their veterinarian for more information on the horse vaccine.

For health information about West Nile virus, please contact your district health department, or visit Health and Welfare's website at: www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention also has useful information about West Nile virus at: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dvbid/westnile/index.htm. For information about protecting your horse, contact your local veterinarian, or visit the Department of Agriculture website at www.agri.idaho.gov. The Idaho Department of Fish and Game has helpful West Nile information at: http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/manage_issues/wnv/surveillance.cfm

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(Editors: For more information please contact Tom Shanahan at 208-334-0668.)